

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION**

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY**

DARYL P. TARPLEY,	:	
	:	Civil Action No. 05-2321 (JBS)
Plaintiff,	:	
	:	
v.	:	<b>OPINION</b>
	:	
STATE OF NEW JERSEY,	:	
et al.,	:	
	:	
Defendants.	:	

**APPEARANCES:**

Plaintiff pro se  
Daryl P. Tarpley  
SBI # 219788B  
Salem County Correctional Facility  
125 Cemetery Road  
Woodstown, NJ 08098

**SIMANDLE**, District Judge

Plaintiff Daryl P. Tarpley, a prisoner currently confined at Salem County Correctional Facility, seeks to bring this action in forma pauperis pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging violations of his constitutional rights. Based on his affidavit of indigence and the absence of three qualifying dismissals within 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g), the Court will grant Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) and order the Clerk of the Court to file the Complaint.

At this time, the Court must review the Complaint to determine whether it should be dismissed as frivolous or

malicious, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.

#### I. BACKGROUND

The following factual allegations are taken from Plaintiff's Complaint and are accepted as true for purposes of this review.

Plaintiff contends that he was wrongfully convicted in Salem County Superior Court as a result of defects in the criminal proceeding including ineffective assistance of counsel, and false testimony in the procurement of a warrant. He alleges that the Defendant Criminal Division Management Office provided inaccurate information at sentencing, causing his sentence to be excessive. Plaintiff states that he has pursued a direct appeal of his conviction and sentence in state court, which is presently pending.

As relief, Plaintiff seeks money damages and a writ of mandamus directing the Superior Court to comply with a state court case which Plaintiff contends conflicts with the actions of the Superior Court. Plaintiff also seeks a change in his sentence.

The named defendants include the State of New Jersey, the Salem County Criminal Division Management Office, and the Salem County Superior Court.

## II. STANDARDS FOR A SUA SPONTE DISMISSAL

This Court must dismiss, at the earliest practicable time, certain in forma pauperis and prisoner actions that are frivolous, malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (in forma pauperis actions); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (actions in which prisoner seeks redress from a governmental defendant); 42 U.S.C. § 1997e (prisoner actions brought with respect to prison conditions).

In determining the sufficiency of a pro se complaint, the Court must be mindful to construe it liberally in favor of the plaintiff. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972); United States v. Day, 969 F.2d 39, 42 (3d Cir. 1992). The Court must "accept as true all of the allegations in the complaint and all reasonable inferences that can be drawn therefrom, and view them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff." Morse v. Lower Merion School Dist., 132 F.3d 902, 906 (3d Cir. 1997). The Court need not, however, credit a pro se plaintiff's "bald assertions" or "legal conclusions." Id.

A complaint is frivolous if it "lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact." Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989) (interpreting the predecessor of § 1915(e)(2), the former § 1915(d)). The standard for evaluating whether a

complaint is "frivolous" is an objective one. Deutsch v. United States, 67 F.3d 1080, 1086-87 (3d Cir. 1995).

A pro se complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim only if it appears "'beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief.'" Haines, 404 U.S. at 521 (quoting Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957)); Milhouse v. Carlson, 652 F.2d 371, 373 (3d Cir. 1981).

Where a complaint can be remedied by an amendment, a district court may not dismiss the complaint with prejudice, but must permit the amendment. Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 34 (1992); Grayson v. Mayview State Hospital, 293 F.3d 103, 108 (3d Cir. 2002) (dismissal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)); Shane v. Fauver, 213 F.3d 113, 116-17 (3d Cir. 2000) (dismissal pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c)(1)); Urrutia v. Harrisburg County Police Dept., 91 F.3d 451, 453 (3d Cir. 1996).

### III. SECTION 1983 ACTIONS

A plaintiff may have a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for certain violations of his constitutional rights. Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party

injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress ... .

Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); Piecknick v. Pennsylvania, 36 F.3d 1250, 1255-56 (3d Cir. 1994).

Local government units and supervisors are not liable under § 1983 solely on a theory of respondeat superior. See City of Oklahoma City v. Tuttle, 471 U.S. 808, 824 n.8 (1985); Monell v. New York City Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91, 694 (1978) (municipal liability attaches only "when execution of a government's policy or custom, whether made by its lawmakers or by those whose edicts or acts may fairly be said to represent official policy, inflicts the injury" complained of); Natale v. Camden County Correctional Facility, 318 F.3d 575, 583-84 (3d Cir. 2003). "A defendant in a civil rights action must have personal involvement in the alleged wrongs, liability cannot be predicated solely on the operation of respondeat superior. Personal involvement can be shown through allegations of personal direction or of actual knowledge and acquiescence." Rode v. Dellarciprete, 845 F.2d 1195, 1207 (3d Cir. 1988) (citations omitted). Accord Robinson v. City of Pittsburgh, 120 F.3d 1286,

1293-96 (3d Cir. 1997); Baker v. Monroe Twp., 50 F.3d 1186, 1190-91 (3d Cir. 1995).

To establish municipal liability under § 1983, "a plaintiff must show that an official who has the power to make policy is responsible for either the affirmative proclamation of a policy or acquiescence in a well-settled custom." Bielewicz v. Dubinon, 915 F.2d 845, 850 (3d Cir. 1990), quoted in Blanche Rd. Corp. v. Bensalem Twp., 57 F.3d 253, 269 n.16 (3d Cir.), cert. denied, 516 U.S. 915 (1995), and quoted in Woodwind Estates, Ltd. v. Gretkowski, 205 F.3d 118, 126 (3d Cir. 2000). A plaintiff must demonstrate that, through its deliberate conduct, the municipality was the moving force behind the plaintiff's injury. Monell, 436 U.S. at 689.

A policy is made "when a decisionmaker possess[ing] final authority to establish municipal policy with respect to the action issues a final proclamation, policy or edict." Kneipp v. Tedder, 95 F.3d 1199, 1212 (3d Cir. 1996) (quoting Pembaur v. City of Cincinnati, 475 U.S. 469, 481, 106 S.Ct. 1292, 89 L.Ed.2d 452 (1986) (plurality opinion)). A custom is an act "that has not been formally approved by an appropriate decisionmaker," but that is "so widespread as to have the force of law." [Bd. of County Comm'rs of Bryan County, Oklahoma v. Brown, 520 U.S. 397, 404 (1997).]

There are three situations where acts of a government employee may be deemed to be the result of a policy or custom of the governmental entity for whom the employee works, thereby rendering the entity liable under § 1983. The first is where "the appropriate officer or entity promulgates a generally applicable statement of policy and the subsequent act complained of is simply an implementation of that policy." The second occurs where "no rule has been announced as policy but federal law has been violated by an act of

the policymaker itself." Finally, a policy or custom may also exist where "the policymaker has failed to act affirmatively at all, [though] the need to take some action to control the agents of the government 'is so obvious, and the inadequacy of existing practice so likely to result in the violation of constitutional rights, that the policymaker can reasonably be said to have been deliberately indifferent to the need.'"

Natale, 318 F.3d at 584 (footnote and citations omitted).

As Plaintiff makes no allegations of that an unconstitutional policy led to the provision of inaccurate information, the damages claim against the Criminal Division Management Office must be dismissed.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

The Eleventh Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that, "The Judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by citizens of another State, or by Citizens or Subjects of any Foreign State."

As a general proposition, a suit by private parties seeking to impose a liability which must be paid from public funds in a state treasury is barred from federal court by the Eleventh Amendment, unless Eleventh Amendment immunity is waived by the state itself or by federal statute. See, e.g., Edelman v. Jordan, 415 U.S. 651, 663 (1974). The Eleventh Amendment protects states and their agencies and departments from suit in federal court regardless of the type of relief sought. Pennhurst State School and Hospital v. Halderman, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984).

Similarly, absent consent by a state, the Eleventh Amendment bars federal court suits for money damages against state officers in their official capacities. See Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159, 169 (1985). Section 1983 does not override a state's Eleventh Amendment immunity. Quern v. Jordan, 440 U.S. 332 (1979).

Title 28 Sections 1915(e)(2)(B)(iii) and 1915A(b)(2) require this Court to dismiss this action if it "seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief."

In addition, neither states, nor governmental entities that are considered arms of the state for Eleventh Amendment purposes, nor state officers sued in their official capacities for money damages are persons within the meaning of § 1983. Will v. Michigan Dept. of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 64, 70-71 and n.10 (1989); Grabow v. Southern State Correctional Facility, 726 F.Supp. 537, 538-39 (D.N.J. 1989) (the New Jersey Department of Corrections is not a person under § 1983).

For the foregoing reasons, all damages claims against the State of New Jersey must be dismissed with prejudice.

Moreover, the Superior Court is an "arm" of the State entitled to share in the State's Eleventh Amendment immunity. See Johnson v. State of New Jersey, 869 F.Supp. 289, 296-97 (D.N.J. 1994).

Moreover, it is not generally the role of the federal courts to interfere in pending state judicial proceedings. A federal



court must abstain from addressing requests for injunctive relief against state court proceedings so long as the constitutional issues involved may be addressed adequately in the course of the state proceedings. Younger v. Harris, 401 U.S. 37 (1971) (addressing abstention from state criminal proceedings); Middlesex Co. Ethics Committee v. Garden State Bar Ass'n, 457 U.S. 423, 432 (1982) ("The policies underlying Younger are fully applicable to noncriminal judicial proceedings when important state issues are involved."). The United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit has enunciated three requirements that must be met before Younger abstention may be invoked:

(1) there are ongoing state proceedings that are judicial in nature; (2) the state proceedings implicate important state interests; and (3) the state proceedings afford an adequate opportunity to raise federal claims. Whenever all three of these requirements are satisfied, abstention is appropriate absent a showing of bad faith prosecution, harassment, or a patently unconstitutional rule that will cause irreparable injury to the plaintiff.

Port Auth. Police Benevolent Ass'n Inc. v. Port Auth. Of New York and New Jersey Police Dept., 973 F.2d 169, 173 (3d Cir. 1992) (citing Schall v. Joyce, 885 F.2d 101, 106 (3d Cir. 1989)). It appears that the pending appeal of Plaintiff's conviction is sufficient to address Petitioner's federal claims. Certainly, Plaintiff has not demonstrated otherwise. Accordingly, the claims for injunctive relief must also be dismissed with prejudice.

Finally, it appears that Plaintiff's damages claims are premature, as he is currently serving the sentence he claims was imposed due to ineffective assistance of counsel and due process violations. In a series of cases beginning with Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475 (1973), the Supreme Court has analyzed the intersection of 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and the federal habeas corpus statute, 28 U.S.C. § 2254. In Preiser, state prisoners who had been deprived of good-conduct-time credits by the New York State Department of Correctional Services as a result of disciplinary proceedings brought a § 1983 action seeking injunctive relief to compel restoration of the credits, which would have resulted in their immediate release. 411 U.S. at 476. The prisoners did not seek compensatory damages for the loss of their credits. 411 U.S. at 494. The Court held that "when a state prisoner is challenging the very fact or duration of his physical imprisonment, and the relief he seeks is a determination that he is entitled to immediate release or a speedier release from that imprisonment, his sole federal remedy is a writ of habeas corpus." Id. at 500.

In Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477 (1994), the Court addressed a corollary question to that presented in Preiser, whether a prisoner could challenge the constitutionality of his conviction in a suit for damages only under § 1983, a form of relief not available through a habeas corpus proceeding. Again,

the Court rejected § 1983 as a vehicle to challenge the lawfulness of a criminal judgment.

[I]n order to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, or for other harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid, a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination, or called into question by a federal court's issuance of a writ of habeas corpus, 28 U.S.C. § 2254. A claim for damages bearing that relationship to a conviction or sentence that has not been so invalidated is not cognizable under § 1983.

512 U.S. at 486-87 (footnote omitted). The Court further instructed district courts, in determining whether a complaint states a claim under § 1983, to evaluate whether a favorable outcome would necessarily imply the invalidity of a criminal judgment.

Thus, when a state prisoner seeks damages in a § 1983 suit, the district court must consider whether a judgment in favor of the plaintiff would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction or sentence; if it would, the complaint must be dismissed unless the plaintiff can demonstrate that the conviction or sentence has already been invalidated. But if the district court determines that the plaintiff's action, even if successful, will not demonstrate the invalidity of any outstanding criminal judgment against the plaintiff, the action should be allowed to proceed, in the absence of some other bar to the suit.

512 U.S. at 487 (footnotes omitted). The Court further held that "a § 1983 cause of action for damages attributable to an unconstitutional conviction or sentence does not accrue until the conviction or sentence has been invalidated." Id. at 489-90.

Plaintiff's claims present the type of claim addressed in Heck; that is, a finding that Plaintiff's conviction was procured by unconstitutional means would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction. See Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984) (describing "the standards by which to judge a contention that the Constitution requires that a criminal judgment be overturned because of the actual ineffective assistance of counsel"); Smith v. Holtz, 87 F.3d 108, 112 (3d Cir.) (involving claims that defendants suppressed exculpatory evidence and contrived inculpatory evidence), cert. denied, 519 U.S. 1041 (1996). As Plaintiff does not contend that his conviction has been invalidated, these claims have not yet accrued.

Several federal courts have applied Heck and its progeny to prisoners' challenges to their sentencing brought as § 1983 actions. See, e.g., Randell v. Johnson, 227 F.3d 300 (5th Cir. 2000), cert. denied, 2001 WL 369855, 69 U.S.L.W. 3480 (Apr. 16, 2001) (affirming dismissal of action challenging sentencing court's failure to grant credit for time served awaiting trial); Wilson v. Lostracco, 221 F.3d 1337, 2000 WL 918331 (6th Cir. June 26, 2000) (affirming dismissal of action challenging imposition of consecutive sentence which disqualified prisoner from participation in community residential placement program); Azania v. Bechert, 172 F.3d 52, 1999 WL 38092 (7th Cir. Jan 8, 1999) (action alleging that sentencing procedure was tainted by

conspiracy among defense counsel, prosecutors, and judge not cognizable under § 1983); Ferguson v. Finney, 104 F.3d 367, 1996 WL 728169 (10th Cir. Dec. 19, 1996) (action alleging that sentencing system discriminates on the basis of race not cognizable under § 1983); Fausset v. Masters, 65 F.3d 174, 1995 WL 499436 (9th Cir. Aug. 22, 1995) (affirming dismissal of action challenging sentencing error which resulted in sentence of imprisonment rather than probation). See also Young v. Dreiblatt, 97 F.3d 1463, 1996 WL 528375 (9th Cir. Sept. 13, 1996) (affirming dismissal of action challenging constitutionality of examining psychiatrists' actions leading to continued civil commitment under Washington Sexually Violent Predators Act, Wash.Rev.Code §§ 71.09.010-71.09.902).

For all of the foregoing reasons, the Complaint must be dismissed for failure to state a claim. It does not appear that Plaintiff can amend his Complaint at this time to state a claim.

#### V. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the Complaint will be dismissed, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1), for failure to state a claim. An appropriate order follows.

s/ Jerome B. Simandle  
Jerome B. Simandle  
United States District Judge

Dated: **January 31, 2006**